

## The Mardasson Memorial at Bastogne



The Mardasson Memorial is a tribute from the Belgian population as a whole to the American nation. Its construction came about thanks to an initiative of the Belgian American Association set up in 1945 and consisting of various Belgian dignitaries who wished to perpetuate the memory of those brave Americans who fell on our soil. Given that the American effort was so decisive here, Bastogne was chosen as the site for the memorial's construction. For the Americans, Bastogne is the symbol of their legendary spirit of resistance, but also of their sense of judgement in their victorious counter offensive.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1946, in what was to become the Memorial's central point, some earth was removed and placed in a casket, which was then sealed in the United States Ambassador's presence and sent by special plane to Washington. A Belgian delegation, led by the Minister of Defense, handed over the sacred casket to the then president of the United States, Harry Truman.

It was above this central point that the stone bearing the following inscription would later be placed.

***LIBERATORIBUS AMERICANIS***

***POPULUS BELGICUS MEMOR***

***4. VII. MCMXLVI***

(The Belgian people remember their American liberators – 4<sup>th</sup> July 1946)

The monument was unveiled on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1950, in the presence of highly respected Belgian and American dignitaries; delegations from England, France, The Netherlands and Luxembourg reinforced the international character of the event. It goes without saying that many veterans associations were present.

A sealed parchment, signed by various Belgian and American dignitaries, is to be found in the foundations. The Memorial is shaped to represent the star of freedom, with five points, each one measuring 31 meters. The central atrium's diameter is 20 meters with a height of up to 12 meters, the summit is encompassed by a circular gallery leading to the orientation tables (scale models showing different stages of the battle), one for each point of the star. The names of the 48 states which then made up the United States are engraved on the crown. Around the outside, badges from the main battalions to have participated in the Battle of the Bulge, can be found. On the inner wall the battle's progression is explained in English and in ten paintings.

A crypt was also dug in the rock; a reminder of the sacrifice made by the 76,890 American heroes killed, injured or reported missing in the battle. Three altars are dedicated respectively to the catholic, protestant and Jewish religions.